

Google's Diplomatic Edge

How the Tech Giant Uses its Washington Ties to Advance its Business Interests Around the Globe

Google Transparency Project

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Google has involved itself in some of the thorniest U.S. foreign policy issues. Is it conducting backchannel diplomacy on behalf of the United States, or for its own business interests?

Introduction

When Eric Schmidt flew to Cuba on his private jet in 2014 with three other Google executives, company lawyers told the U.S. government it was strictly for academic research purposes.¹ Newly unearthed documents suggest they may have stretched the truth.

According to documents obtained under open-records requests, Google's lawyers assured Treasury officials charged with enforcing the U.S. embargo there was "no commercial purpose for this travel, and Google has no plans to conduct any business activities while in Cuba."² "The research is non-commercial and academic in nature," Google's application stated.³

Instead, the four Google executives—whom they referred to in their application as researchers—merely wished to conduct academic research in Cuba on how to "promote positive social change via the internet," the lawyers wrote.⁴ Using soaring rhetoric, Google told the U.S. Treasury office that administers sanctions that it wished to travel to Cuba to understand its "autocratic and ghastly approach to free speech, and to map out a way to dismantle it."⁵

"Google asks these questions not because Google has commercial interest in any of the answers, but because they are the most important questions to ask of an autocratic regime, and because Google is among the few institutions in the world equipped to ask them," its lawyers wrote. "None of these goals have any commercial value, but they have massive implications."⁶

To qualify for the license to travel to Cuba, the four Google executives promised to publish the fruits of their academic research, most likely in the form of an Op-Ed. "In this specific case of Cuba, Google has no commercial interest," they wrote. "Rather, the interest is in learning more about the state of connectivity on the island."⁷

¹ Flight records show a Gulfstream G5 registered by Eric Schmidt with tail number N785QS flew from Miami International Airport to José Martí International Airport just outside Havana on June 26, 2014, returning to Miami the same day. The Gulfstream G5 made a second round-trip from Miami to Havana on June 28, 2014.

² FOIA documents from Treasury OFAC, p. 21 available at: <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/5676933-OFAC-Google-Cuba-Responsive-Docs.html>

³ FOIA documents from Treasury OFAC, p. 19 available at: <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/5676933-OFAC-Google-Cuba-Responsive-Docs.html>

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ FOIA documents from Treasury OFAC, p. 22 available at: <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/5676933-OFAC-Google-Cuba-Responsive-Docs.html>

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ *Id.*

Once they arrived on the island, however, the Google executives embarked on a packed agenda of meetings with officials that act as gatekeepers to the Cuban internet, including from Cuba's state telecom body, the state internet service provider, and the government body that runs public internet "cafes," according to a detailed schedule for the trip.

Those contacts opened the door to a series of historic business deals between Google and Cuba, which had been inaccessible to U.S. companies for more than half a century.⁸ Less than two months after their return, Google announced that its web browser, Chrome, would be available in Cuba for the first time.⁹ A few months later, Google further expanded its product offering in Cuba, making available its Google Play app store and Google Analytics user-tracking software for Cuban websites.¹⁰

The frenzy of deal-making has continued to the present day. In December 2016, in the closing days of the Obama administration, Schmidt was back in Havana, signing a deal to place servers on the island to ensure faster delivery of Google content.¹¹ In 2018, Google signed four memoranda of understanding with Cuba, "to promote Cuban content."¹²

Google's early trip to Cuba—made ostensibly for academic research purposes—turned out to have broad commercial implications for the company

The string of deals has apparently culminated in an agreement to wire-up the island with internet hotspots and connect it to the mainland via one, perhaps two undersea cables.¹³ On March 28, 2019, Cuba and Google signed a "peering agreement" to connect their networks through a new, physical link.¹⁴

Google's early trip to Cuba—made ostensibly for academic research purposes—turned out to have broad commercial implications for the company, putting it in pole position to connect one of the largest remaining virgin markets in the hemisphere.

Schmidt's unusual visit to Cuba also presaged an unexpected and major shift in U.S. policy toward Cuba. In December 2014, six months after the trip, the Obama

⁸ <https://www.state.gov/e/eb/tfs/spi/cuba/>

⁹ <https://web.archive.org/web/20190115200455/https://plus.google.com/+google/posts/aDCuE9Kpd75>

¹⁰ <http://thenextweb.com/google/2014/11/26/google-launches-free-android-apps-analytics-cuba-following-eric-schmidts-call-end-us-embargo-country/>

¹¹ <https://www.wsj.com/articles/google-signs-deal-with-cuba-to-speed-services-1481573940>

¹² <https://web.archive.org/web/20190104220148/http://en.granma.cu/cuba/2018-10-04/cuba-signs-four-memoranda-of-understanding-with-google>

¹³ <https://web.archive.org/web/20190115180905/https://havana-live.com/google-will-build-an-underwater-cable-to-improve-the-internet-in-cuba/>

and <https://web.archive.org/web/20190115181420/https://www.accesswire.com/528526/Independent-Cuban-Fashion-Label-Clandestina-and-Google-Together-Launch-a-New-Clothing-Collection-Inspired-by-Cuba-Coming-Online>

and <https://www.efc.com/efc/espana/gente/t-rex-de-la-desconexion-google-mascota-cuba-que-anhela-internet/10007-3816332>

¹⁴ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-cuba-usa-google/google-cuba-agree-to-work-towards-improving-islands-connectivity-idUSKCN1R91ZP>

administration restored full diplomatic relations and eased restrictions on U.S. companies' ability to provide internet services on the island.¹⁵

Some reports after the visit noted the coincidence of Google's outreach to Cuba with the Obama administration's secret negotiations with Cuba. The new documents raise new questions about those events.¹⁶

Google's travel applications, combined with the pattern of deals and announcements made in the wake of the trip, raise questions about whether the company was forthright in its true motives for sending its executives to the island. They also raise the question of whether the Obama administration—which enjoyed an unusually close relationship with the technology company—deliberately looked the other way in its enthusiasm to see a thaw in relations with Cuba.¹⁷

The Trump administration has since rolled back some of those changes and Schmidt has stepped down as the executive chairman of Google's parent company, Alphabet.¹⁸ But as a board member, he still serves as a key diplomatic conduit to the Cuban government, squiring its new leader around New York on a 2018 trip to meet U.S. technology executives and members of Congress.¹⁹

Google's chief executive, Sundar Pichai, met in the White House with President Donald Trump on March 27, 2019, just a day before Google announced its internet peering deal with Cuba. Trump tweeted that they had discussed “various things that @google could do for our Country,” without specifying if the Cuban agreement was one of them.²⁰

Google's business model relies on getting ever more users' data and selling it to advertisers. As developed markets become saturated with Google products, the company is in a high-stakes race with competitors like Facebook to be the gateway to the internet for what Schmidt has called “the next 5 billion.”²¹

Cuba fit the bill: In 2014, just 3-4% of its residents had access to the internet, Schmidt said, presenting a clear incentive to wire the island before the company's competitors got there.²²

Google's successful Cuban foray in 2014 was organized by Google Ideas, the company's internal “think/do tank,” which has since been renamed Jigsaw.²³ In its Treasury

¹⁵ https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-switch/wp/2014/12/18/at-the-heart-of-obamas-cuba-doctrine-the-internet/?utm_term=.875ac4f36150

¹⁶ <https://www.wsj.com/articles/google-and-obama-administration-connect-over-cuba-1458763836>

¹⁷ The trip was nearly derailed by weeks of wrangling by career Treasury officials over whether Google's existing general license would cover the trip, and whether they could bring their own flight crew, the documents show. The additional license was ultimately greenlighted the day before the planned trip. A Treasury official had warned colleagues they might “get calls about this,” possibly an indication they understood the political sensitivity of the issue within the administration.

¹⁸ <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2017/11/08/trump-cracks-down-u-s-business-and-travel-cuba/843419001/> and <https://www.cnn.com/2017/12/21/eric-schmidt-is-stepping-down-as-the-executive-chairman-of-alphabet.html>

¹⁹ <https://www.miamiherald.com/news/nation-world/world/americas/cuba/article219003055.html>

²⁰ <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1110989594521026561>

²¹ <https://web.archive.org/web/20190204153842/https://www.richardjohnashe.com/eric-schmidt-at-mobile-world-congress-2012/>

²² <https://web.archive.org/save/https://plus.google.com/+EricSchmidt/posts/X8UXDYZEwdu>

²³ <https://medium.com/jigsaw/google-ideas-becomes-jigsaw-bcb5bd08c423>

application, Google portrayed the unit as a purely philanthropic endeavor unconnected to its business.

“Google Ideas is not a revenue-generating division of Google,” the company’s lawyers wrote. “Google Ideas does not make products to sell. The work is open-sourced, and is it dedicated to empowering minority rights and enshrining free speech.”²⁴

However, an examination of the group suggests that Google Ideas, and its successor Jigsaw, is more than a charitable arm of the company. The group acts as an important business development unit for the company, opening new markets for its products, securing new data to feed its advertising-supported model, and addressing challenges that may lead governments to regulate its business.²⁵

Most of the international events it sponsored were attended by the company’s top business development executives. Tellingly, Google Ideas originally resided not in the company’s philanthropic arm, Google.org, but in Google’s Business Strategy division.²⁶ Its goals mostly dovetail with Google’s commercial interests.

In contrast to the characterization Google used to secure its licenses to travel to Cuba, employees in that unit had an explicitly commercial mission. “Business Strategy Googlers anticipate opportunities and execute programs critical to Google’s short- and long-term growth,” the company explained on a since-deleted webpage.²⁷

While the Google executives painted their visit to Cuba as part of a global mission to challenge autocratic regimes, actual academics have been skeptical of Google’s reasons for promoting free speech online.

“In this specific case of Cuba, Google has no commercial interest,” company lawyers wrote.

“While it seems clear that Googlers do genuinely support freedom of expression as a fundamental human right, there is little evidence that this is the reason the company pursues greater global connectivity,” wrote Shawn Powers and Michael Jablonski of Georgia State University.²⁸

The authors pointed to Google’s ready compliance with censorship and law-enforcement demands from authoritarian regimes including China, Egypt, Turkey, and Pakistan. Its

²⁴ FOIA documents from Treasury OFAC, p. 19 available at: <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/5676933-OFAC-Google-Cuba-Responsive-Docs.html>

²⁵ *The Ideas Industry*, Daniel Drezner, Oxford University Press, 2017, available at:

<https://books.google.com/books?id=8g8xDgAAQBAJ&lpg=PA163&ots=TIG2hi4S9h&dq=Google%E2%80%99s%20Business%20operations%20and%20Strategy%20department%20%22google%20ideas%22&pg=PA164#v=onepage&q&f=false>

²⁶ <https://web.archive.org/save/https://www.google.pl/about/careers/teams/business-strategy/> and *The Ideas Industry*, Daniel Drezner

²⁷ <https://web.archive.org/web/20170111205927/https://careers.google.com/fields-of-work/business-strategy/>

²⁸ *The Real Cyber War: The Political Economy of Internet Freedom*, Shawn M. Powers, Michael Jablonski, University of Illinois Press, 2015, p. 97, available at: <https://books.google.com/books?id=pWazBgAAQBAJ&lpg=PP1&pg=PA97#v=onepage&q&f=false>

efforts to broaden access to the internet, meanwhile, were conducted “exclusively on its own terms” in ways that benefitted the company’s bottom line.²⁹

“It is thus difficult to suggest that the company’s desire for freedom of expression is driving its global business strategy,” they wrote. A more compelling explanation for Google’s interest in internet freedom and connectivity: “the simple fact that its survival...depends on getting more and more people online to use its complimentary services.”³⁰

Google’s use of its Washington ties to further its business interests abroad stretches well beyond Cuba. A detailed review of Google’s cooperation with the U.S. State Department shows the trips fit a pattern, as the company worked hand-in-hand with the foreign policy establishment, furthering the Obama administration’s goals while using its influence around the world to secure a competitive advantage in newly-emerging markets.

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In November 2009, for example, Schmidt joined a delegation of tech executives on a State Department-sponsored visit to Iraq, where just over 1% of the population was then using the internet.³¹ A day after the visit, which included meetings with the Iraqi foreign minister and the minister of communications,³² Google announced it would partner with the governments of Iraq and the U.S. to help the Middle East country launch its first government YouTube channel.³³

In January 2013, Schmidt again mixed diplomacy and business, travelling to North Korea with former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Bill Richardson. The motive for the trip was unclear, but reportedly included private negotiations for the release of an imprisoned American and meetings with the country’s senior leadership to discuss technology and the internet.³⁴

About two weeks after the trip, Google Earth had satellite imagery available of North Korea for the first time.³⁵ Again, the trip bore fruit, though less dramatically than in Cuba. Google is reportedly one of the few online databases available in the country, mainly to officials. By April 2018, it was ranked as the preferred search engine by the few internet users in North Korea, far surpassing Chinese search engine Baidu.³⁶

²⁹ *The Real Cyber War: The Political Economy of Internet Freedom*, p. 97

³⁰ *The Real Cyber War: The Political Economy of Internet Freedom*, p. 97

³¹ https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09BAGHDAD3201_a.html; <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.NET.USER.ZS?locations=IQ>

³² https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09BAGHDAD3201_a.html

³³ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2009/11/26/us-iraq-youtube-government-idUSTRE5AO35H20091126>

³⁴ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/01/07/us-korea-north-richardson-idUSBRE90600A20130107>

³⁵ <https://theweek.com/articles/468253/4-mustsees-google-new-map-north-korea>

³⁶ <https://www.upi.com/Report-Google-is-North-Koreas-No-1-search-engine/8111522747462/>

A central player in Google's digital diplomacy has been Jared Cohen, who forged a bond with Schmidt when he led the State Department delegation to Iraq in 2009. Schmidt recruited Cohen, then 28, to lead Google Ideas in 2010.³⁷ The two men travelled to more than 30 countries in the following year, including China, Myanmar, and Egypt, as they developed a book-length treatise about technology's impact on the future of government and business.³⁸

Under Cohen's direction, Google Ideas began to play an increasingly active role in U.S. foreign policy issues, with the State Department at times appearing to outsource part of its public diplomacy mission to the company.³⁹ Google carried out a wide range of missions in coordination with the administration, aiding U.S. internet propaganda efforts and other advocacy projects that, Cohen said, were too sensitive for overt efforts by the U.S. government.

"There are things the private sector can do that the U.S. government can't do," Cohen told *Foreign Policy* when announcing his transition from the State Department to Google. "On some topics, it's very sensitive for government to be the one doing this."⁴⁰

Google Ideas launched a number of public interest projects whose aims aligned with U.S. foreign policy goals: a visualization of global arms sales; a tool to engage Somali citizens in drafting a new constitution through cloud-based surveys; a hotline for victims of human trafficking; a social network of former extremists; and a tool for mapping Syrian defectors.⁴¹

But those efforts—and the group's lofty rhetoric—obscure the business objectives behind many of its activities: opening new markets for Google.



Eric Schmidt and President Obama at a White House tech policy meeting

To achieve its goals, Google and its leaders forged close personal ties to senior Obama administration officials. Google executives met at the White House an average of once a week during the Obama administration.⁴² Schmidt enjoyed unfettered access during that

³⁷ <https://foreignpolicy.com/2010/09/07/state-department-innovator-goes-to-google/> and <http://nymag.com/news/intelligencer/google-eric-schmidt-jared-cohen-2013-6/>

³⁸ <https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/214925/the-new-digital-age-by-eric-schmidt-and-jared-cohen/9780307947055/>

³⁹ <http://business.time.com/2013/10/21/google-digital-rebels/>

⁴⁰ <http://foreignpolicy.com/2010/09/07/state-department-innovator-goes-to-google/>

⁴¹ <https://medium.com/jigsaw/google-ideas-becomes-jigsaw-bcb5bd08c423> and <https://jigsaw.google.com/projects/>

⁴² <https://www.googletransparencyproject.org/articles/googles-white-house-meetings>

time, holding 18 meetings at the White House between 2009 and 2015.⁴³

Relations were so cozy that Schmidt was forced to announce that he had no interest in a Cabinet job in Obama's second administration.⁴⁴ Schmidt did join a White House technology advisory council and continues to head a Pentagon advisory board.⁴⁵

With their frequent visits to reclusive and repressive regimes, some well-connected people began to suspect Cohen and Schmidt were conducting their own back-channel diplomacy on behalf of the White House, pushing technology as a means to foment civil unrest. Even senior executives at Google itself began to suspect Cohen was working on behalf of the White House, according to leaked emails from Stratfor.com, the private strategic intelligence platform.

"Google believes he's on a specific mission of 'regime change' on the part of leftist fools inside the WH who are using him for their agendas," wrote a Stratfor executive who claimed to speak regularly to Schmidt and other Google executives.⁴⁶ After more digging, the Stratfor executive came to a clear conclusion, echoing Cohen's own description of his new role as being able to do things the U.S. government cannot.

"GOOGLE is getting WH and State Dept. support and air cover. In reality, they are doing things the CIA cannot do...[Cohen] is going to get himself kidnapped or killed. Might be the best thing to happen to expose GOOGLE's covert role in foaming up-risings, to be blunt. The US Govt can then disavow knowledge and GOOGLE is left holding the shit bag."⁴⁷

Google officials eventually moved to rein-in Cohen. They pushed back against a planned trip to the Iranian border, calling him a "lightening rod" and "instigator," according to emails to Stratfor.⁴⁸ But Schmidt didn't shy away from public discussion of controversial U.S. foreign policy, using a blog post after his June 2014 trip to Cuba to call for an end to the U.S. embargo.

"The 'blockade' makes absolutely no sense to US interests," Schmidt wrote, noting that the absence of American business had allowed Chinese technology to dominate the island.⁴⁹ "If you wish the country to modernize the best way to do this is to empower the citizens with smart phones (there are almost none today) and encourage freedom of expression and put information tools into the hands of Cubans directly."⁵⁰

⁴³ <https://theintercept.com/2016/04/22/googles-remarkably-close-relationship-with-the-obama-white-house-in-two-charts/> and <https://www.googletransparencyproject.org/articles/eric-schmidt-obamas-chief-corporate-ally>

⁴⁴ <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2012-11-09/eric-schmidt-i-m-not-joining-the-obama-administration>

⁴⁵ <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2017/01/09/celebrating-contributions-presidents-council-advisors-science-and-technology> and <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-military-innovation/former-google-ceo-schmidt-to-head-new-pentagon-innovation-board-idUSKCN0W421V>

⁴⁶ <https://search.wikileaks.org/gifiles/emailid/1113596>

⁴⁷ <https://search.wikileaks.org/gifiles/?viewemailid=1121800#searchresult>

⁴⁸ https://wikileaks.org/gifiles/docs/11/1164190_google-loose-canon-bound-for-turkey-and-uae-sensitive-do-not.html

⁴⁹ <https://web.archive.org/save/https://plus.google.com/+EricSchmidt/posts/X8UXDYZEwdu>

⁵⁰ The post on the now defunct Google+ appears to be the only effort to deliver on the executives' promise to publicly disseminate the results of their academic research

When President Obama announced he was restoring full diplomatic relations with Cuba, he echoed Schmidt, saying, “I believe in the free flow of information. Unfortunately, our sanctions on Cuba have denied Cubans access to technology that has empowered individuals around the globe.”⁵¹

Google’s early lead in Cuba has positioned the company to gain access to the personal data of millions of new internet users for its advertisers. But Schmidt’s Cuba adventure is only one example of how Google’s business interests became deeply intertwined with the Obama administration’s foreign policy agenda.

Google’s deep involvement in U.S. foreign policy issues has given the company a crucial edge over competitors in opening up new markets around the world. The company has worked hard to maintain its influence during the current administration: Schmidt has visited Trump officials on several occasions and stopped by the White House as recently as January 2018.⁵²

⁵¹ <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/the-switch/wp/2014/12/18/at-the-heart-of-obamas-cuba-doctrine-the-internet/>

⁵² <https://www.googletransparencyproject.org/articles/google-ingratiates-itself-trump-administration> and <https://www.axios.com/alphabets-eric-schmidt-v-1516163542-728c9e88-1c0d-4824-9851-290e7848eb68.html>

Jared Cohen and the Launch of Google Ideas

Google’s “digital diplomacy” goes far beyond what is typical even for politically-engaged multinationals and technology companies. Nowhere was this more apparent than at Google Ideas, launched by Eric Schmidt in 2010 with a mission to “explore how technology can enable people to confront threats in the face of conflict, instability or repression.”⁵³

To run the new enterprise, Schmidt recruited Jared Cohen, a well-connected State Department official who modeled Google Ideas on the department’s internal think tank, the Policy Planning Group, where he had worked for four years, championing the use of technology to promote American values and undermine authoritarian governments.⁵⁴

Cohen, a Rhodes Scholar who is fluent in Swahili,⁵⁵ was hired at the State Department by Condoleezza Rice, who he first contacted while he was an undergraduate at Stanford, where she had been provost.⁵⁶ Cohen went on to serve under Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, one of only a few Bush era appointees to remain at State under the Obama administration.



Jared Cohen was hired at the State Department by Condoleezza Rice

Cohen worked under Anne-Marie Slaughter, the director of policy planning, to champion Clinton’s “21st Century Statecraft,” an effort to harness social media and digital technology to the State Department’s public diplomacy goals. (Slaughter is today CEO of New America,⁵⁷ a Washington think tank that has counted Google and Schmidt among its top donors.⁵⁸)

The State Department initiative promoted a number of digital projects that blurred the line between public diplomacy, advocacy and, in some cases, allegedly inciting insurrection in other countries. And it gave Cohen frequent opportunities to work closely with Google—so closely that Schmidt once referred to Cohen and a State Department colleague as “our representatives to the government.”⁵⁹

⁵³ <https://www.fastcompany.com/3056790/google-ideas-think-tank-to-become-tech-incubator-called-jigsaw> and <https://www.chathamhouse.org/events/view/198727>

⁵⁴ <http://2001-2009.state.gov/t/us/2008/112310.htm>

⁵⁵ <https://2001-2009.state.gov/s/p/72899.htm>

⁵⁶ http://alumni.stanford.edu/get/page/magazine/article/?article_id=29494

⁵⁷ <https://web.archive.org/web/20190115191449/https://www.newamerica.org/our-people/anne-marie-slaughter/>

⁵⁸ <https://www.newamerica.org/our-funding/our-funders/> and <https://www.newamerica.org/our-people/eric-schmidt/>

⁵⁹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4C6_uRGSQtM#t=1767



Google sponsored the first two summits organized by the Alliance of Youth Movements

In 2008, Cohen and a State Department colleague launched the Alliance of Youth Movements (AYM), a nonprofit clearinghouse for young activists around the world.⁶⁰

Google sponsored the group's first two summits, in New York in December 2008⁶¹ and in Mexico City in October 2009.⁶² Google also sent representatives from its New Business Development team to the events, including several who went on to work in the Obama White House.⁶³

In October 2010, AYM launched Movements.org, a web platform to “facilitate partnerships between activists, private-sector companies, governments, media, academics and other civil society organizations.”⁶⁴

A starker rendering of the origins of AYM and Movements.org is contained in emails leaked from Stratfor.com and hosted by WikiLeaks. A March 2011 internal email describes a “not for publication” account of the group’s founding, attributed to a “main organizer” at the group:

How Movements.org got started: [This part is not for publication] in 2008 it became apparent to the USG that they needed to do public diplomacy over the internet. So Jared Cohen was at DoS then and played a major role in starting the organization. The main goal was just spreading the good word about the US. Similar initiatives have come about in 21st Century Diplomacy and Civil Society 2.0, but movments.org has since split from the US government.⁶⁵ [sic]

Through his work on AYM and other activities, Cohen became a primary liaison between Silicon Valley and the U.S. government, at times using those relationships to further U.S. government foreign policy goals.

During the turbulent Iranian elections of early 2009, for example, Cohen called Twitter co-founder Jack Dorsey to ask the company to defer scheduled maintenance of its servers so that protesters could continue using the social media tool.⁶⁶ That summer, State

⁶⁰ <http://2001-2009.state.gov/r/us/2008/112310.htm>

⁶¹ <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/5685394-AYM-NYC-Attendees.html>

⁶² <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/5685401-AYM-Mexico-City-Attendees.html>

⁶³ <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/5685394-AYM-NYC-Attendees.html>

⁶⁴ <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/5685375-Jared-Cohen-Movements-Dot-Org-Announcement.html>

⁶⁵ https://wikileaks.org/gifiles/docs/13/1356429_-alpha-insight-us-mena-movements-org-.html

⁶⁶ <https://web.archive.org/web/20190115193525/https://stanfordmag.org/contents/diplomacy-2-0>

Department cable traffic released by WikiLeaks shows, Cohen travelled to Afghanistan, where he met with the country's mobile telephone operators to discuss moving their antennas onto U.S. military bases for greater security.⁶⁷

Later in 2009, Cohen began leading "technology delegations" to foreign countries with heads of leading tech companies. While billed as diplomatic trips, they also served to market American technology products to foreign countries.

"That was Jared's whole purpose . . . exposing these people to these tools," said John Donahoe, the eBay chief executive.⁶⁸

The first of these missions was in November 2009 to Iraq. The U.S. delegation included leaders of nine private sector technology companies, including Google's Schmidt,⁶⁹ whose daughter Sophie Schmidt, described as a "YouTube videographer," also travelled with the group.

The delegation met with Foreign Minister Zebari, Deputy Prime Minister Eissawi, the minister of communications, and Gen. Ray Odierno, commander of U.S. forces in Iraq, "to exchange views on how to improve Iraq's internet and technology industry," according to leaked State Department cable traffic.⁷⁰

The rate of internet use was extremely low in Iraq, at just over 1% of the population, according to the World Bank⁷¹—precisely the kind of untapped market that could help Google reach "the next 5 billion" before its competitors.

Just a day after the Iraq trip, Google announced it would partner with the governments of the U.S. and Iraq to help the Middle East country launch its first government YouTube channel.⁷² Cohen also arranged for Google engineers to help digitize the collection of Iraq's national museum, which was closed to visitors due to instability in the region.⁷³

About six weeks after the Iraq trip, in January 2010, Clinton and Cohen hosted Schmidt and other tech leaders for a private dinner at the State Department to discuss their role in Clinton's 21st Century Statecraft initiative.⁷⁴ (In July 2014, Clinton, by then former secretary of state, visited Google's Mountain View headquarters.⁷⁵)

Among the attendees at the dinner was Jason Liebman, the CEO of Howcast.com and a former Google executive who co-founded AYM with Cohen. In a post that reveals just how closely Google and the State Department were working, Liebman described a two-

⁶⁷ https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09KABUL2020_a.html

⁶⁸ <https://web.archive.org/web/20190115193525/https://stanfordmag.org/contents/diplomacy-2-0>

⁶⁹ <http://foreignpolicy.com/2010/09/07/state-department-innovator-goes-to-google/>

⁷⁰ https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09BAGHDAD3201_a.html

⁷¹ <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.NET.USER.ZS?locations=IQ>

⁷² <http://www.reuters.com/article/2009/11/26/us-iraq-youtube-government-idUSTRE5AO35H20091126>

⁷³ https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09BAGHDAD3201_a.html

⁷⁴ <http://allthingsd.com/20100107/guess-whos-coming-to-dinner-eric-schmidt-and-the-technorati-visit-the-state-department/>

⁷⁵ <https://web.archive.org/web/20190205192444/https://talksat.withgoogle.com/talk/hard-choices>

hour “brainstorming session” led by Clinton about what technology companies could do to help promote the State Department’s global agenda.

From organizing a technology delegation to Iraq last April to ***sending Google CEO Eric Schmidt to Baghdad last month*** and hosting this dinner discussion, it’s clear that the U.S. State Department is strongly supporting and encouraging digital diplomacy.⁷⁶ [*Emphasis added.*]

In February 2010, Cohen and Alec Ross, a senior advisor for innovation to Secretary Clinton, visited Google’s Mountain View headquarters for a series of internal seminars and a public talk with Schmidt about Clinton’s initiative.⁷⁷

During the talk, Schmidt said:

I like to think of Alec and Jared as our representatives to the government. ... We elected these guys, if you will, to represent our values and the things we care about. ... We consider them some of the best friends of Google.



Hillary Clinton hosted Eric Schmidt and other tech leaders at a private State Department dinner in 2010, and, in 2014, she visited Google’s Mountain View headquarters

In October 2010, Schmidt hired Cohen, then 28, to run Google Ideas.⁷⁸ If Cohen was previously Google’s informal representative in the U.S. government, as Schmidt contended, now the young diplomat would be the company’s formal representative in Washington and foreign policy circles.

Cohen’s arrival at Google marked a time of transition at the company. In early 2011, Schmidt stepped down from his role as CEO and became the company’s executive chairman. He quickly became absorbed in the kind of international work he had hired Cohen to pursue.

Schmidt and Cohen co-authored an article about “digital disruption” that appeared in *Foreign Affairs* just a month after Cohen joined Google.⁷⁹ Over the next year, the two men traveled the world together, developing their ideas into what would become a book-length manifesto, *The New Digital Age: Reshaping the Future of People, Nations and Business*.

In the book, published in April 2013, Schmidt and Cohen make the self-serving case that growing interconnectedness made possible by mobile technology will make the world a

⁷⁶ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jason-liebman/perspective-on-digital-di_b_416876.html

⁷⁷ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4C6_uRGSQtM#t=1767

⁷⁸ <http://www.fastcompany.com/1695515/google-grabs-state-dept-star-jared-cohen-foreign-policy-think-do-tank>

⁷⁹ <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2010-10-16/digital-disruption>

better place. They wrote: “The best thing anyone can do to improve the quality of life around the world is to drive connectivity and technological opportunity. When given the access, the people will do the rest.”⁸⁰

Opening Cuba

A year after their book was published, Schmidt and Cohen had their sights set on Cuba, where less than 5% of the island’s 11 million residents had access to the internet.

According to a review of travel documents obtained through a public records request, they had planned a three-day visit to the island in June 2014, and were to be joined by two other Google executives: Brett Perlmutter, an expert on Latin America, and Daniel Keyserling, a communications specialist and veteran of Hillary Clinton’s 2008 campaign.⁸¹

But a May 2014 request from Google for special permission to take the company’s own flight crew on the trip prompted the Department of Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) to take a closer look at the plans.⁸²

In response to a request for more information, lawyers for the company said in a June 17, 2014, letter that the visit was for “professional research” and therefore should be covered by a “general license,” a relatively routine level of permission that covers several broad categories of travel to the island.⁸³

During this visit, the researchers are hoping to better assess the technical capabilities of organizations and individuals in Cuba to conduct social change and human rights activities via the Internet, specifically democracy, empowerment through speech, freedom of expression, human and civil rights, relief aid, promotion of health and peace-inspired themes. Additionally, the researchers would like to promote a healthy dialogue between the government and these individuals and organizations in order to promote more open Internet communication. There is no commercial purpose for this travel, and Google has no plans to conduct any business activities while in Cuba.

In a June 17, 2014, letter, Google’s lawyers assured Treasury Department officials that the Cuba trip had “no commercial purpose”

⁸⁰ *The New Digital Age Reshaping the Future of People, Nations and Business*, p. 257 available at: https://books.google.com/books/about/The_New_Digital_Age.html?id=jmxSYrJUgxC

⁸¹ FOIA documents from Treasury OFAC, p. 19 available at: <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/5676933-OFAC-Google-Cuba-Responsive-Docs.html>; <https://www.linkedin.com/in/dan-keyserling-6b42229/>

⁸² FOIA documents from Treasury OFAC, p. 26 available at: <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/5676933-OFAC-Google-Cuba-Responsive-Docs.html>

⁸³ FOIA documents from Treasury OFAC, p. 20 available at: <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/5676933-OFAC-Google-Cuba-Responsive-Docs.html>

Aware that use of a general license requires “academic research that has a substantial likelihood of public dissemination and is in the traveler's professional area,” the application and supplemental materials submitted by Google also touted Schmidt and Cohen’s book and said the Google team planned to “jointly author an Op-Ed piece on what they have learned during the trip.”⁸⁴

The materials submitted by Google’s lawyers stressed that there was “no commercial purpose for this travel, and Google has no plans to conduct any business activities while in Cuba.”⁸⁵

Google Ideas is not a revenue-generating division of Google. Google Ideas does not make products to sell. The work is open-sourced, and is it dedicated to empowering minority rights and enshrining free speech.⁸⁶

By June 20, 2014, after OFAC refused to issue a general license for the trip, the Google team was forced to change its approach. With the planned June 26 departure day fast approaching, they sought approval for a “specific license,” requiring case-by-case approval, for the four executives. After several increasingly frantic follow-up notes from Google, OFAC issued a specific license for Schmidt and the three others late on June 25—just one day before they were to travel.⁸⁷

>> I appreciate your call yesterday afternoon. We are awaiting any update you can provide to, hopefully, keep this trip on schedule for tomorrow. Please send us an email or give me a call at (b)(6) as soon as you have something to report.

>>

>> Again, we appreciate your efforts and hope to hear good news from you soon.

As the scheduled departure date approached, Google’s lawyers took an increasingly urgent tone in their correspondence with Treasury officials

But a review of Google’s application materials—as well as the rapid deal-making that followed the trip—suggests that Google had very real commercial interests at stake during the visit, despite its assurances to the contrary. The first item on the itinerary provided to OFAC by Google counsel was a reception by officials from Cuba’s telecommunications authority Empresa de Telecomunicaciones de Cuba S.A. (ETECSA), before they even left the airport.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ FOIA documents from Treasury OFAC, pp. 20, 22 available at: <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/5676933-OFAC-Google-Cuba-Responsive-Docs.html>

⁸⁵ FOIA documents from Treasury OFAC, p. 21 available at: <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/5676933-OFAC-Google-Cuba-Responsive-Docs.html>

⁸⁶ FOIA documents from Treasury OFAC, p. 20 available at: <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/5676933-OFAC-Google-Cuba-Responsive-Docs.html>

⁸⁷ FOIA documents from Treasury OFAC, p. 15 available at: <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/5676933-OFAC-Google-Cuba-Responsive-Docs.html>

⁸⁸ FOIA documents from Treasury OFAC, p. 24 available at: <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/5676933-OFAC-Google-Cuba-Responsive-Docs.html>

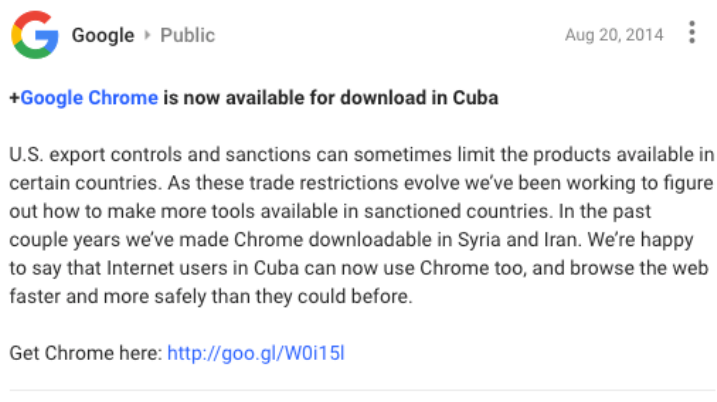
PROGRAMA GENERAL DE LA VISITA

Jueves 26

- 10:45 Llegada al Aeropuerto Internacional José Martí.
Recibimiento en el aeropuerto por funcionarios de ETECSA.
 - [Arrival at José Martí International; Reception by representatives from ETECSA \(Note: this is the Cuban telecom\)](#)
- 12:00 Alojamiento en el hotel Nacional.
 - [Accommodation in the Hotel Nacional](#)
- 13:00 Almuerzo de cortesía ofrecido por ETECSA.
 - [Lunch offered by ETECSA](#)
- 15:00 Reunión de trabajo con ETECSA.
 - [Work meeting with ETECSA](#)
- 16:30 Presentación e intercambios en la empresa de Tecnologías de la Información y Servicios Telemáticos Avanzados (CITMATEL).
 - [Presentation and exchange at CIMATEL \(Information Technologies and Advanced Telematic Services\) \[Note: this is the Cuban ISP\]](#)
- 18:00 Regreso al hotel.
 - [Return to the hotel](#)

During the course of the trip, the Google team held several additional meetings with ETECSA, and with another important ally in Google's ongoing quest to connect Cuba to the internet, the government-run Information Technologies and Advanced Telematic Services Company (CITMATEL).⁸⁹

The trip quickly bore fruit. Less than two months after Cohen and Schmidt's June 2014 visit to Havana, Google announced that its Web browser, Google Chrome, would be available for use in Cuba for the first time.⁹⁰ Its announcement suggested that Google and the Obama administration were working together to relax export controls on technology products to the island:



In November 2014, Google expanded the products it offered in Cuba to include free versions of Google Play and Google Analytics,⁹¹ furthering its edge over any competitors who might wish to join the race to wire the island.

⁸⁹ FOIA documents from Treasury OFAC, p. 24 available at: <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/5676933-OFAC-Google-Cuba-Responsive-Docs.html>

⁹⁰ <https://web.archive.org/web/20190204230815/https://plus.google.com/+google/posts/aDCuE9Kpd75>

⁹¹ <http://thenextweb.com/google/2014/11/26/google-launches-free-android-apps-analytics-cuba-following-eric-schmidts-call-end-us-embargo-country/>

Google's actions in 2014 proved prescient—or well-informed. Weeks later, on December 17, the Obama administration made a startling announcement: the restoration of full diplomatic relations with Cuba after 18 months of secret talks.⁹² As the *Washington Post* noted, increased internet access was a key aim of Obama's Cuba policy.⁹³

The historic White House announcement echoed the language used in Google's summer travel application. Google had promised that its research “would simply help support the spread of democratic principles and the availability of more free communications for Cuban citizens.”⁹⁴

The White House, for its part, said it was “initiating new efforts to increase Cubans' access to communications and their ability to communicate freely.” Accordingly, it authorized “commercial export of certain items that will contribute to the ability of the Cuban people to communicate with people in the United States and the rest of the world.”⁹⁵

*Google's actions in 2014 were either spectacularly
prescient—or well-informed*

Shortly after hearing the news, Alec Ross, one of Cohen's former State Department colleagues, tweeted: “#netfreedom at center of opening up #Cuba. Good to see @JaredCohen & @ericschmidt personally engaged there.”⁹⁶

But some saw self-interest driving Google's Cuban moves: “Google is helping to accelerate the development of future markets for its products and services, from old-fashioned search to Android-powered phones,” Mark Walsh wrote in *Quartz* in early 2015. “That focus on providing cheaper access, coupled with Google executives' Cuba visit last year, could give the company an edge over more traditional ISPs when it comes to partnering with Cuba.”⁹⁷

Notably, neither Schmidt nor the others on the summer 2014 trip appear to have written the Op-Ed promised in their travel application. Schmidt did write a blog post shortly after his return, calling for an end to the U.S. embargo,⁹⁸ a bold public statement that was followed just a few months later by Obama's historic decision to restore full diplomatic relations with the island.⁹⁹

⁹² <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/18/world/americas/us-cuba-relations.html>

⁹³ <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/the-switch/wp/2014/12/18/at-the-heart-of-obamas-cuba-doctrine-the-internet/>

⁹⁴ FOIA documents from Treasury OFAC, p. 20 available at: <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/5676933-OFAC-Google-Cuba-Responsive-Docs.html>

⁹⁵ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/12/17/fact-sheet-charting-new-course-cuba>

⁹⁶ <https://web.archive.org/web/20190204191353/https://twitter.com/AlecJRoss/status/552496908149985283>

⁹⁷ <http://qz.com/354110/how-google-can-make-cubas-web-truly-worldwide/>

⁹⁸ <https://web.archive.org/web/20190104201445/https://plus.google.com/+EricSchmidt/posts/X8UXDYZEwdu>

⁹⁹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/18/world/americas/us-cuba-relations.html>

Further Outreach to Cuba

As Google continued its Cuba outreach, it made further requests at the Treasury Department.

In January 2015, the company filed another application with Treasury's OFAC, this time seeking renewal of a license to award prizes to Cuban winners of internet-based software coding contests. In its application, the company said the license to "award prizes of cash and certain low-cost logoed products ('schwag') to software coding contest winners from Cuba" should be permitted because the contest serves both entertainment and educational purposes.¹⁰⁰ A two-year renewal was granted in May 2015.¹⁰¹

In March 2015, Google Ideas officials again visited Cuba. Perlmutter, who was later appointed as the Cuba lead for Alphabet,¹⁰² and the think tank's deputy director, Scott Carpenter, met with university students and officials to discuss the opportunities of an open internet.¹⁰³



The Cubans they met saw little distance between the Google executives and the U.S. government. "Google Ideas is very close to the State Department, especially to Hillary Clinton, who will likely run for the presidency on the Democratic ticket," noted Karel Pérez Alejo, a university professor and a web developer. He added that Google Ideas'

¹⁰⁰ FOIA documents from Treasury OFAC, p. 29 available at: <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/5676933-OFAC-Google-Cuba-Responsive-Docs.html>

¹⁰¹ FOIA documents from Treasury OFAC, p. 27-28 available at: <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/5676933-OFAC-Google-Cuba-Responsive-Docs.html>

¹⁰² <https://www.computerworld.com/article/3056627/internet-of-things/why-even-google-cant-connect-cuba.html>

¹⁰³ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/afp/article-2994133/Google-execs-woo-Cuba-IT-students.html> and <https://web.archive.org/save/https://twitter.com/BrettPerlmutter/status/577150123341438977>

projects “are essentially directed at subversion— through the use of technology—in countries with freedom-of-expression problems, as they understand them.”¹⁰⁴ He wrote:

“From the point of view of a percentage of the State Department officials and some of the Google executives, Cuba could be the ideal location to apply Google Ideas products. “Publish your site with me, so the Cuban government can’t close it; navigate through this protected network without problems; write a proposal for a new Constitution for Cuba.”

As if to drive home Perez Alejo’s message, Google’s second visit was followed days later by an official visit from the Obama administration’s international internet czar, Daniel Sepulveda, whose formal title was deputy assistant secretary of state and U.S. coordinator for international communications and information policy.¹⁰⁵ Sepulveda was leading a delegation that included officials from the Department of Commerce and the Federal Communications Commission.¹⁰⁶

Google’s second visit to Cuba was followed days later by an official visit from the Obama administration’s international internet czar

Sepulveda had been a vocal advocate for US technology companies like Google on trade and technology issues, suggesting, for example, that European Union investigations of U.S. technology companies were motivated by protectionism.¹⁰⁷

After returning from Cuba, Sepulveda described receiving a warm reception in Cuba. “We underscored our belief that markets open to foreign investment and competition, and committed to providing unfettered access to the Internet, have had the greatest success in achieving broad connectivity and in reaping the associated economic and social development gains,” he said.¹⁰⁸

Sepulveda also promoted new legislation, the Cuba Digital and Telecommunications Advancement Act, which would “reaffirm the authority of the President to permit exports of telecommunications and technology services and infrastructure to Cuba.”¹⁰⁹

Google officials, meanwhile, touted the U.S. government’s efforts in Cuba. Soon after his return from Cuba, Perlmutter tweeted:¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁴ <https://web.archive.org/web/20190115200138/https://progresoweekly.us/google-ideas-is-not-google/>

¹⁰⁵ <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2015/06/daniel-sepulveda-internet-ambassador-118564> and <https://web.archive.org/web/20190201225013/https://2009-2017.state.gov/r/pa/ei/biog/bureau/209063.htm>

¹⁰⁶ <https://web.archive.org/web/20190201224240/http://en.escambray.cu/2015/cuba-us-delegations-exchange-on-telecommunications/>

¹⁰⁷ <http://www.politico.eu/article/european-union-or-mean-girl-us-catherine-novelli-antitrust-google-case/>

¹⁰⁸ <https://web.archive.org/web/20190204160416/https://progresoweekly.us/toward-a-digitally-connected-cuba/>

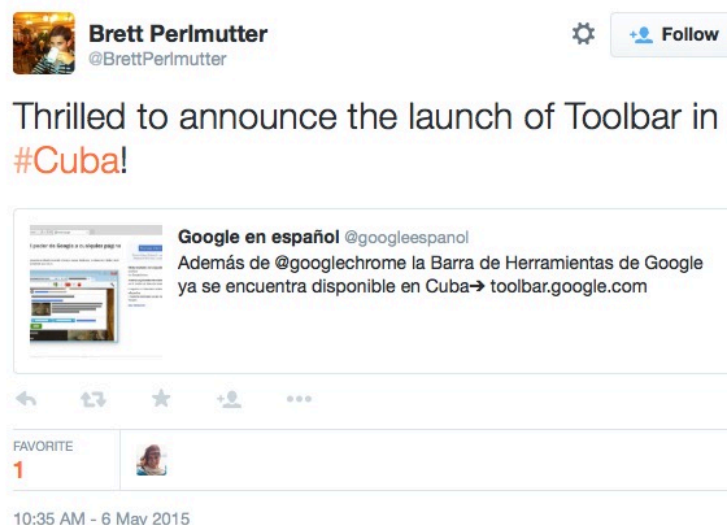
¹⁰⁹ <https://web.archive.org/web/20190204160416/https://progresoweekly.us/toward-a-digitally-connected-cuba/>

¹¹⁰ <https://web.archive.org/web/20190204161654/https://twitter.com/BrettPerlmutter/status/588056702836154369>



Shortly after Perlmutter’s April 2015 tweets, Google again reached out to the U.S. Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control, this time to arrange a sit-down meeting on more Cuba-related efforts. The efforts were focused on ETECSA—who the Google executives had met less than a year earlier—and they concerned an application for a general license for Cuba.¹¹¹

The meeting between OFAC’s Susan Demske and Davin Blackborrow and Google took place on April 28, 2015. Days later Perlmutter celebrated Google’s roll-out of new services in Cuba:¹¹²



¹¹¹ FOIA documents from Treasury OFAC, p. 11 available at: <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/5676933-OFAC-Google-Cuba-Responsive-Docs.html>

¹¹² <https://web.archive.org/web/20190131230115/https://twitter.com/BrettPerlmutter/status/596020355829002240>

Google stayed focused on Cuba throughout 2015. In mid-November, the Google executives reached out to Demske and Blackborrow “to explain further technical issues relating to the possibility of providing peering and caching services in Cuba.”

In a joint email to other officials, Demske and Blackborrow pointed to the administration’s focus on Cuba as a reason to take the Google meeting. “As you know, the Administration has highlighted the importance of enhancing communications in Cuba as one of its highest priorities,” they wrote.¹¹³



Brett Perlmutter
@BrettPerlmutter

Follow

Honored to be alongside @ericschmidt in Havana to sign 1st Internet agreement in history btwn a US company & Cuba
[nytimes.com/aponline/2016/ ...](http://nytimes.com/aponline/2016/)



In late 2016, faced with the possibility that Obama-era changes in Cuba policy might be rolled back by the incoming Trump administration, Google rushed to conclude another important deal. In December 2016, in the final weeks of the Obama administration, Google’s parent company Alphabet Inc. reached an agreement with Cuba’s ETECSA, allowing Alphabet to place servers on the island to provide faster access to Google services in the country.¹¹⁴ Schmidt himself signed the deal in Havana.

Days later, Cuba cut internet costs by 25%, and the state

telecommunications authority indicated that it was considering changing its policies to open Cuba up to more internet access.¹¹⁵

In the spring of 2017, ETECSA started a pilot program that installed internet access in 2,000 homes across Cuba, although costs were expected to be prohibitively high for most Cubans after the pilot ended.¹¹⁶ Still riding on the Obama administration’s Cuba policies, Google became the first foreign internet company to launch in Cuba when its servers went live on April 26, 2017.¹¹⁷

¹¹³ FOIA documents from Treasury OFAC, p. 1 available at: <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/5676933-OFAC-Google-Cuba-Responsive-Docs.html>

¹¹⁴ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-38297926>

¹¹⁵ <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2016/12/cuba-slashes-internet-costs/>

¹¹⁶ <https://www.cnbc.com/2017/04/26/google-just-became-the-first-foreign-internet-company-to-launch-in-cuba.html>

¹¹⁷ <https://www.cnbc.com/2017/04/26/google-just-became-the-first-foreign-internet-company-to-launch-in-cuba.html>;
<http://uk.businessinsider.com/cuba-online-revolution-google-2017-4>

Six months after Google turned on its servers in Cuba, the Trump administration restricted access to the country, reversing many of the new and open Obama policies.¹¹⁸ But Google was not ready to give up on its Cuba effort.

On June 4, 2018, U.S Senator Jeff Flake, an Arizona Republican, joined Schmidt and the Trump administration's top diplomat in Havana in a meeting with Cuba's new leader Miguel Diaz-Canel.¹¹⁹ After the trip, Flake said Google was close to reaching an agreement with Cuba on further expanding internet access, with Cuban officials reportedly interested in Google connecting Cuba to a new underwater cable.¹²⁰

Perlmutter and Schmidt both expressed their gratitude for the meeting on Twitter:¹²¹



In October 2018, the company made further inroads into Cuba, signing four memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with Cuban state ministries and academic institutions including the University of Computer Sciences; Infomed, Cuba's health portal;¹²² the Ministry of Culture; and the Havana City Historian's Office.¹²³

Few details about the MOUs are available, but they are reported to reflect "Havana's willingness to circumvent the economic and technological limitations imposed by the US embargo, reinforced by the Donald Trump Administration, and advance in the late computerization process from the country."¹²⁴

Google's actions in Cuba served as a model for the company's efforts to move into other emerging markets, including Iran¹²⁵ and Myanmar.¹²⁶ Aided by its deep connections with the Obama administration, Google was able to expand its product offerings in these

¹¹⁸ <https://eu.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2017/11/08/trump-cracks-down-u-s-business-and-travel-cuba/843419001/>

¹¹⁹ <https://www.elnuevoheraldo.com/noticias/mundo/america-latina/cuba-es/article212630404.html> and

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-cuba-usa/u-s-senator-flake-former-google-ceo-meet-with-new-cuban-president-idUSKCN1J0323>

¹²⁰ <https://www.miamiherald.com/news/nation-world/world/americas/cuba/article212660549.html>

¹²¹ <https://web.archive.org/web/20190204162402/https://twitter.com/ericschmidt/status/1004516780268589056> and

<https://web.archive.org/save/https://twitter.com/BrettPerlmutter/status/1004139646773858306>

¹²² <https://translate.google.com/translate?hl=en&sl=es&u=http://www.sld.cu/&prev=search>

¹²³ <https://web.archive.org/web/20190115201048/http://www.ahora.cu/en/cuba-en/3038-cuba-signs-four-memoranda-of-understanding-with-google/>

¹²⁴ <https://web.archive.org/save/https://havana-live.com/cuba-signs-four-memoranda-of-understanding-with-google/>

¹²⁵ <https://web.archive.org/web/20190115201255/https://googleblog.blogspot.com/2011/01/software-downloads-for-iran.html>

¹²⁶ <https://thenextweb.com/asia/2013/03/21/google-opens-local-search-site-partial-access-to-google-play-in-myanmar-ahead-of-eric-schmidt-visit/>

countries, which had long been off-limits to American companies because of economic sanctions and export controls. No other U.S. technology company appears to have received the same opportunities.

Engaging North Korea

In January 2013, Cohen and Schmidt travelled to North Korea with former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Bill Richardson.

Weeks earlier, North Korea had carried out a suspected long-range missile test, and U.S. authorities were exploring additional sanctions on the regime. The U.S. State Department criticized the trip, saying it was “ill-advised”¹²⁷ and that the timing was not “particularly helpful.”¹²⁸

Google’s motive was unclear, but the trip reportedly included private negotiations for the release of an imprisoned American and meetings with the country’s senior leadership to discuss technology and the internet.¹²⁹

Some of the most detailed reporting on the trip came from Schmidt’s daughter Sophie, a graduate student who accompanied her father and posted a detailed account of the visit on her blog.¹³⁰ She called the trip “a mixture of highly staged encounters, tightly-orchestrated viewings and what seemed like genuine human moments. We had zero interactions with non-state-approved North Koreans and were never far from our two minders (2, so one can mind the other).”

North Korean newspapers reported the Schmidt had “expressed admiration and paid respect to Comrade Kim Il-sung and Comrade Kim Jong-il.”¹³¹ The visit was denounced by many observers as a public relations coup for North Korea’s leaders.

Cohen made several such visits after his foreign trips, suggesting they could have been official debriefings.

Cohen made several White House visits after his foreign trips, suggesting they may have been official debriefings

Shortly after their return from North Korea, visitor logs show Cohen was back at the White House to meet with National Security Council director of global engagement

¹²⁷ <http://www.usatoday.com/story/tech/2013/01/07/bill-richardson-google-eric-schmidt-visit-north-korea/1814931/>

¹²⁸ http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/11/world/asia/eric-schmidt-bill-richardson-north-korea.html?_r=0

¹²⁹ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/01/07/us-korea-north-richardson-idUSBRE90600A20130107>

¹³⁰ <https://web.archive.org/web/20190115201424/https://sites.google.com/site/sophieinnorthkorea/home>

¹³¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/11/world/asia/eric-schmidt-bill-richardson-north-korea.html>

Shaarik Zafar.¹³² It isn't clear what was discussed at the meeting. But Cohen made several such visits after his foreign trips, suggesting they could have been official debriefings.

Roughly two weeks after the trip, Google Earth made satellite imagery of North Korea available for the first time, replacing what had long been a large blank spot on its maps.¹³³

By April 2018, Google was ranked as the number one search engine of choice among the few internet users in North Korea, surpassing Chinese search engine Baidu.¹³⁴

Stratfor Leaks

Emails leaked from the private strategic intelligence platform Stratfor.com suggest that Cohen's travels were raising concerns within Google that he would be perceived as a U.S. agent fomenting instability around the world.

In February 2011, Stratfor security expert Fred Burton noted that Cohen had traveled to Tunisia and Egypt.¹³⁵ Burton wrote, "Cohen, a Jew, is bound to get himself whacked... Google is not clear if Cohen is operating w/a State Dept/WH license, or a hippie activist. Google may be more important than Obama. Their lefty billionaire owners think they can change the world."¹³⁶

Burton later spoke with and exchanged emails with Google sources whom he later identified as Eric Schmidt and Google's head of security Marty Lev.¹³⁷ Burton reported to his staff:

It is unclear to GOOGLE if [Cohen is] driving without a license, but Google believes he's on a specific mission of 'regime change' on the part of leftist fools inside the WH who are using him for their agendas.¹³⁸

He added: "State is behind these events."¹³⁹

Later that month, Cohen planned a visit with an unnamed "senior Google Executive" to the Azerbaijan/Iran border. "The purpose of this trip is to exclusively engage the Iranian community to better understand the challenges faced by Iranians as part of our Google Ideas group on repressive societies."¹⁴⁰

¹³² <http://thememoryhole2.org/blog/wh-logs-obama>; <https://2009-2017.state.gov/r/pa/ei/biog/230768.htm>

¹³³ <https://theweek.com/articles/468253/4-mustsees-googles-new-map-north-korea>

¹³⁴ <https://www.upi.com/Report-Google-is-North-Koreas-No-1-search-engine/8111522747462/>

¹³⁵ <https://search.wikileaks.org/gifiles/emailid/1113596>

¹³⁶ <https://search.wikileaks.org/gifiles/?viewemailid=1111729>

¹³⁷ <https://search.wikileaks.org/gifiles/emailid/398679>

¹³⁸ <https://search.wikileaks.org/gifiles/emailid/1113596>

¹³⁹ <https://search.wikileaks.org/gifiles/emailid/1136342>

¹⁴⁰ https://wikileaks.org/gifiles/docs/11/1121800_re-google-and-iran-internal-use-only-pls-do-not-forward-.html

After speaking with Google officials, Burton told staff:

GOOGLE is getting WH and State Dept. support and air cover. In reality, they are doing things the CIA cannot do. But I agree with you. He's going to get himself kidnapped or killed. Might be the best thing to happen to expose GOOGLE's covert role in foaming up-risings, to be blunt. The US Govt can then disavow knowledge and GOOGLE is left holding the shit bag.¹⁴¹

Google executives ultimately discouraged Cohen from taking the proposed trip and voiced their own suspicions about Cohen working on behalf of the White House. As a senior Google executive wrote:¹⁴²

There is potential risk to Google's brand and each situation further perpetuates the image of Jared as a spy or agent of the U.S. (or Israeli) Gov't.

Despite these concerns, the Google executive apparently did not recommend that Cohen stop his activities. Rather, the executive wrote, Cohen should "let time pass before being visible and associated with people known by their states to be active in challenging repressive societies."¹⁴³

Cohen appears not to have received the message. Days later, visitor logs show he visited the White House to meet with Quintan Wiktorowicz, the National Security Council senior director for global engagement.¹⁴⁴ It isn't clear what was discussed at the meeting.

"GOOGLE is getting WH and State Dept. support and air cover. In reality, they are doing things the CIA cannot do"

When Google Meets WikiLeaks

WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange also voiced concerns that Cohen and Schmidt might be working on behalf of the Obama administration.

In 2011, Schmidt, who is married, was reported to have begun an affair with the head of public relations at the Council on Foreign Relations, Lisa Shields.¹⁴⁵ CFR is a think tank with close ties to the State Department, and Shields has reportedly acted as a backchannel for the Department of State on sensitive diplomatic issues.

¹⁴¹ <https://search.wikileaks.org/gifiles/?viewemailid=1121800#searchresult>

¹⁴² <https://search.wikileaks.org/gifiles/emailid/1164190>

¹⁴³ <https://search.wikileaks.org/gifiles/emailid/1164190>

¹⁴⁴ <http://thememoryhole2.org/blog/wh-logs-obama>; <https://www.linkedin.com/in/quintanwiktorowicz>

¹⁴⁵ <http://pagesix.com/2011/07/28/google-boss-dates-p-r-beauty/>

When Schmidt and Cohen met with Assange in June 2011 at a house in the English countryside where the Australian was under house arrest, Shields accompanied them. Assange wrote about the meeting in a book titled *When Google meets WikiLeaks*.¹⁴⁶

A year after their meeting, when Julian Assange attempted to contact Hillary Clinton to discuss his impending leak of State Department cables, the person who responded to his call was Shields.¹⁴⁷

“It was at this point that I realized Eric Schmidt might not have been an emissary of Google alone,” Assange wrote. “Whether officially or not, he had been keeping some company that placed him very close to Washington, DC, including a well-documented relationship with President Obama.”¹⁴⁸

“Not only had Hillary Clinton’s people known that Eric Schmidt’s partner had visited me, but they had also elected to use her as a back channel. While WikiLeaks had been deeply involved in publishing the inner archive of the US State Department, the US State Department had, in effect, snuck into the WikiLeaks command center and hit me up for a free lunch. Two years later, in the wake of his early 2013 visits to China, North Korea, and Burma, it would come to be appreciated that the chairman of Google might be conducting, in one way or another, ‘back-channel diplomacy’ for Washington.”

As for Cohen, Assange said he could be dubbed Google’s “director of regime change,” and noted that his directorate “appeared to cross over from public relations and ‘corporate responsibility’ work into active corporate intervention in foreign affairs at a level that is normally reserved for states.”¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ *When Google Met WikiLeaks*, Julian Assange, excerpt available at: <https://wikileaks.org/google-is-not-what-it-seems/>

¹⁴⁷ *When Google Met WikiLeaks*, Julian Assange p. 20

¹⁴⁸ *When Google Met WikiLeaks*, Julian Assange p. 20

¹⁴⁹ *When Google Met WikiLeaks*, Julian Assange p. 22